

Gratitude: High Yield, Low Risk Investments

Opportunities You Can't Afford to Miss

This week I talked with a man who was frustrated by a boss who wouldn't say, "thank you". This isn't a "high-needs" guy, but he's self-aware enough to recognize that, like most of us, he's energized by gratitude. Having just poured extraordinary effort into a successful endeavor, a little appreciation seemed reasonable.

His initial reaction was, "I'm not appreciated – I should just quit." But he recognized this was just a reaction, not a rational response. He processed through it over time and came to accept that the pluses of his job overcame this minus. Put yourself in his position (not hard for most of us) and you probably realize you won't be at your best while wrestling through the issue. For some, that processing time may be seconds or minutes. For others it may be days, weeks, or longer. So if you're the boss in this scenario, would you prefer your employee spends energy stewing over being unappreciated or being productive?

And it takes very little for you to redirect that energy into productivity.

Confession time: I'm one of those people who doesn't express gratitude easily. Sometimes I just don't think of it (although I somehow manage to remember many less important things), and other times I'm afraid praising someone for something that's less than perfect will cause them to stop striving to improve (reality proves affirmation causes most people to work even harder).



Some of the best help I've received on this issue came from one of my employees. She made it quite clear that I was not doing well at appreciating her talents, efforts, decisions, leadership, sacrifices...or anything else. And she was right.

So I enlisted her help. I told her I intended to never let her leave my office without having been appreciated for something. Far too often she would stand at the door looking at me until I came up with something. Those awkward moments were good motivation for me to improve my attentiveness at praising her before that point. I can't say my problem disappeared, but it was a big step in strengthening my gratitude muscle.

Here are six tips for leveraging your investments in gratitude:

1. **Be alert.** Look for opportunities to thank people.
2. **Be sincere.** If you don't truly appreciate the contribution of others, you might reconsider whether you belong in leadership.
3. **Be specific.** "Thank you" is good. "Thank you for..." is better. "I'm impressed with how well you..." is even better.
4. **Be timely.** Don't delay until tomorrow appreciation you can express today.
5. **Be public.** Appreciating someone to or in front of others pays big dividends (sensitivity alert: not always true of everyone). If you're afraid others will feel left out, it probably means you're not making gratitude a regular part of your culture. They should recognize their turn is coming.
6. **Be aware.** Not everyone values different forms of praise the same. Verbal, in writing, tweets, email, public, private – learn (by doing!) what each person values most.

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